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ABSTRACT

The role of ethics in institutional management and instruction and the need for ethics codes have been identified as major issues currently facing community colleges in the United States. In general, ethics codes represent professional ideals, serving as guides for behavior and establishing principles of performance. A study was recently conducted by the Community College Studies Program at the University of California, Los Angeles and the Irvine Group (a group of prominent current and emeritus educators) of 2,500 two- and four-year colleges to identify existing administrator and faculty ethics codes. A total of 413 institutions provided usable responses, and only 36 of these institutions reported administrator ethics policies. With respect to community colleges, these policies tended to specify professional standards for conflict of interest, integrity, nepotism, and accountability. The most common issue covered in college faculty ethics codes was faculty responsibilities, occurring in 27 of 33 responding two-year colleges. In addition, most locally developed policies included a section concerning the ethical obligations of faculty as teachers. The survey also revealed a strong emphasis on faculty rights and conflict of interest. Only four community colleges submitted sexual harassment ethics codes, and no community college submitted a policy concerning ethics in research. In addition to institutional ethics statements, many collective bargaining agreements also detail the rights and responsibilities of faculty members. (PAA)

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ADMINISTRATOR AND FACULTY ETHICS CODES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by Tronie Rifkin

"Teaching, scholarship, and service represent the triadic mission of an institution of higher education. Linking this academic trinity is the pursuit, dissemination, and application of truth and knowledge. Critical to each of these undertakings is the need for absolute honesty and integrity in both the processes utilized and the individuals involved in the pursuit." (Pancrazio and Aloia, 1992)

Since the beginning of the decade, public scrutiny of the behavior of educational administrators and faculty has intensified, as allegations and investigations of misconduct have increased in number and visibility. A growing awareness of the influence of educators on social welfare and individuals' lives as well as uncertainty about values and what constitutes appropriate behavior have led to questions about the roles and responsibilities of professionals in education. For the past ten years, authors have cautioned that, without internally developed guidelines, ethics codes may be imposed on education professionals by external agencies, such as legislatures, unions, or the courts (Schurr, 1982; Kerr, 1992). In 1991, the Institute for Future Studies (Macomb Community College) identified the role of ethics in institutional management and instruction as one of the top ten issues facing U.S. community colleges.

Why Are Ethics Codes Important?

In general, ethics codes represent professional ideals, serve as a guide for behavior, and establish principles of performance (Moriarty, 1992). In higher education, the adoption of ethics codes also demonstrates to the public that the institution is committed to an academic environment free of unethical conduct. As Hankin (1992) argues, ethical dilemmas will be a part of campus life, and institutions must provide clear guidelines about the ethical choices they expect faculty and administrators to make. Ethics problems do exist on U.S. campuses. A 1992 study (Pancrazio and Aloia, 1992) of research misconduct at universities revealed that, at the institutions reporting faculty misconduct (38% of the sample), problems included mishandling of finances, falsification of data, plagiarism, and professional misconduct in work with clients. The adoption of ethics codes, however, does not guarantee ethical conduct; if the signals are not clear, unethical practices will certainly take place. "When people believe their actions will go unnoticed, they will be less likely to hold themselves accountable" (Hankin 1992, p.100).

The UCLA/Irvine Group Study

As part of a broader study of academic ethics, the Community College Studies Program (CCSP) at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in conjunction with the Irvine Group (a group of prominent current and emeritus educators) conducted a survey to identify existing administrator and faculty ethics codes used by two- and four-year institutions (Koltai, Rifkin & Byrnes, 1991). In addition to measuring the prevalence of ethics codes at two-year institutions, the study identified the types of administrator and faculty ethics codes and the kinds of behavior emphasized.

Administrator Ethics Codes

The UCLA/Irvine Group project surveyed 2,500 two- and four-year colleges across the United States and received a total of 413 responses. Only 36 institutions, half of which were two-year colleges, submitted administrator ethics policies. Several institutions have recently adopted the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) "Recommended Code of Ethics for Community, Technical, and Junior College Chief Executive Officers," ratified in April, 1991. Others subscribe to the American Association of University Administrators "Professional Standards of Administrators in Higher Education" and a few follow state-mandated codes.

Four content areas are prevalent within the community college administrator ethics policies: conflict of interest, integrity, nepotism, and accountability. Codes specifying professional standards for conflict of interest and integrity predominate. More than most, the AACC code of ethics promotes the values of trust and respect for all persons; honesty in work and deed; fairness and justice in interpersonal dealings; integrity; keeping promises; commitment to intellectual and moral development, quality, individual empowerment, the community college philosophy, and to the college above oneself; openness in communication; and belief in diversity. The AACC code also distinguishes responsibilities among board members; administration, faculty and staff; students; other educational institutions; business, civic groups, and the larger community.

With their varying content and emphases, administrator ethics policies show the complexity of the issues and bring to light the continuing evolution of such codes. Community colleges are responding to public criticism by tackling ethical issues and taking a leadership role in the development of ad-

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ministrator ethics. Defining the professional responsibilities of administrators is a positive step toward preventing an unethical climate on campus.

Faculty Ethics Codes

The UCLA/Irvine Group survey received 181 faculty ethics codes from responding institutions, including 33 from community colleges. The faculty codes cover faculty rights, faculty responsibilities, conflict of interest, research integrity, sexual harassment, and various other issues. Most of the community college faculty ethics codes (27 of 33) delineate policies related to faculty responsibilities. One-third of the responding institutions subscribe to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) "Statement on Professional Ethics," while the remainder have developed their own policies, often based on the AAUP statement.

The AAUP statement sets forth the ethical obligations of faculty as members of a discipline, as teachers, as colleagues, as members of institutions, and as members of community. Generally, the locally developed statements cover at least three of these areas, and the most evolved section in almost every policy concerns faculty ethics as teachers. The detail with which this particular area of faculty responsibility is covered reflects and reinforces the community college commitment to teaching.

The survey results also reveal a strong emphasis on faculty rights and conflict of interest. Faculty rights policies are concerned with issues of academic freedom and offer straightforward statements on faculty rights as citizens, as classroom teachers, and as scholars. Conflict of interest policies, however, are not as straightforward, varying from institution to institution. Among the main conflict of interest issues are outside employment, nepotism, and gifts and gratuities. Nonetheless, the variety of issues that fall under "conflict of interest" suggests that many of the policies were developed in reaction to a particular incident at the institution. A comprehensive conflict of interest policy specifically developed for community colleges might set a better precedent.

Only four community colleges submitted sexual harassment ethics codes. This is surprising given the amount of attention sexual harassment has received in the last decade. Today, sexual harassment policy development and implementation is becoming more complex as issues concerning sexual relationships on campus between faculty and students are increasing and requiring guidelines.

No community college submitted a policy concerning etnics in research, although such policies are common at four-year institutions. Since community college faculty do conduct research and receive government funding to do so, it may behoove community colleges to establish research guidelines.

Faculty ethics are also defined in collective bargaining agreements. In 1992, 334 public and private two-year colleges had collective bargaining agreements with faculty (Douglas, 1992). As Schurr forewarned in 1982, the majority specify in varying degrees of detail the rights and responsibilities of faculty members based on "explicit negotiations involving the interest of professionals and the interests of employers" (Schurr, 1982, p. 321). Many address the same sorts of conflict of interest issues covered in ethics statements, and several cover a variety of ethical considerations in sections on "Dismissal for Cause".

Conclusion

The adoption of a code of ethics is one step toward the creation of an academic environment free of unethical conduct. Comprehensive and well-developed codes of ethics set the standards for community college administrators and faculty. Little (1989) points out that faculty in particular have a responsibility to uphold their professional standards because our legal system defers to their judgement in cases concerning higher education: "With this high regard comes a concomitant expectation of professional behavior" (Little, 1989, p. 64). Such regard suggests that ethical behavior of higher education professionals, including administrators, is essential if two-year institutions are to maintain the public's confidence and their faculty and administrators are to act as role models for students -- the future leaders of our society.

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